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## HOUSES OF BRICKS IMPORTED FROM ENGLAND.

By GEORGE ALFRED TOWNSEND.

(Read before the Society November 9, 1903.)

The proposition before us is, "Are there existing here any houses of imported bricks from England?" Not, were there ever such houses? not imported bricks from other colonies, or from Holland; for the continual form of the statement is "this house was built of bricks imported from England." Nor do the trimmings of houses, such as mantels, fireplaces and insertions, come under the words: "The house was *built* of bricks from England."

I take the view that no house is made of English bricks. None of the authorities are contemporary with the constructions, their basis is a tradition often from the kitchen. The repetition of the statement is from irresponsible sources, not able to weigh testimony.

Only four years before the war of 1861 Bishop Meade's "Old Churches and Families of Virginia" set the myth in motion, and it reposes mainly in the picture magazines of to-day, which have no criterion and are munching marvel.

The custodian of the Maryland Historical Society has handed me a memorandum of all the imported bricks brought into that province, of which there is a record. There are three importations and they cover eight years' time.

The schooner *Nancy* of 20 tons brought 2,000 bricks from Charleston, S. C., enough to build a burial vault. The *Live Oak* of 70 tons brought 6,000 bricks from

Philadelphia, enough to build a chimney. The same number of bricks, 6,000, were brought on the ship *Britannia*, 120 tons, from Bristol, England, only six years before the Continental Congress met, when every hamlet had its brickyard.

If this be the sole record of the shipment of English bricks, let us consider what they would construct. A single chimney, such as the end chimneys outside of the old houses, if forty feet high and six feet by three square, would have 720 feet square face of wall twelve inches thick, and require over 16,000 bricks. The 6,000 Bristol bricks, therefore, would only raise it about 15 feet from the ground. And this is the only importation in the record of a province where about every early brick house has the imputation of "imported brick." The librarian said that they probably were wanted for a mantel-piece.

While it is not easy to prove a negative, there must also be a positive. Bricks from England must be proved by other than hearsay. But it is hard to drop a habit. Here is Hester Dorsey Richardson in the *Baltimore Sun* of October 25, referring to the house of Francis Lee on Nanticoke River, near Delaware State, called Rehoboth. "This old house," she says, "is still standing, and is in a good state of preservation. Its architectural design is early colonial and the brick of which it is built is of English mould." A slight tremor is in the form of the last statement: "English mould." The county history from which the lady took her statements gives a picture of a mean little house, with a door down in the corner and two windows next, and a barn roof.

Wm. Hand Browne, a Marylander, says in his "Maryland Palatinate":

"It is doubtful whether a single house (in Maryland) was built of imported brick. We find a contract for making brick as early as 1653 and still earlier mention of brickmakers."

The Pocomoke River, which divides peninsular Maryland from Virginia and was settled in 1665, has at its mouth the best brick house, and almost the only one visible from the water, "Beverly." I wrote to Judge J. Upshur Dennis, of Baltimore, for the age of this house and to learn if he knew of any imported brick houses on the Eastern shore. This is his answer:

"Beverly was certainly not built of imported brick. The present building was commenced in 1774 by my great-great-grandfather, Littleton Dennis (the fourth in descent from Donnoch Dennis, who was the first settler in this colony, coming from the Eastern shore of Virginia with the Quakers in 1665) and it was finished by his widow, Susanna (daughter of Arthur Upshur, of Upshur's Neck, Northampton Co., Va.), in 1777. The former house there was built also of brick, but I have no idea that it, or, in fact, any other house in this colony was built of imported brick.

"*A priori*," continues Judge Dennis, "one must almost inevitably reach the conclusion that the theory of imported brick is a misty fable, when it is considered how illy-equipped for the storms of the North Atlantic, the small ships of those early days were and how unlikely they would be to burden themselves with such a cargo, especially when the crying need of the colonies was for manufactured goods, from which the freight profits must have enormously exceeded any possible to have been derived from the limited cargo of bricks. Mr. Philip A. Bruce's publication of the Virginia Historical Society has completely exploded the misty myth and the persistence of the fable, has always been in a direct ratio with the size and squalor of the building."

Mr. Bruce, writing a deductive book upon the "Economic History of Virginia," declares that "all

bricks used in Virginia in the seventeenth century were manufactured there; that bricklayers and brickmakers arrived in 1607; that in 1622 bricks formed one of the principal articles exported from Virginia to the Bermudas; that the Royal Governor Berkeley's brick house had only six rooms; that the Indians were repulsed with brickbats"; and he calls it improbable that "when bricks were rated at eight shillings a thousand in Virginia, planters would have been led to import them from England where, between 1650 and 1700, they could not be purchased for less than eighteen shillings, adding to that transportation across the ocean."

The son of President John Tyler by his New York wife, Professor Lyon Gardiner Tyler, of William and Mary College, a systematic genealogist of Virginia, has repudiated the imported brick. He finds that the house of Roswell, which Bishop Meade called an immense pile of building, had only twenty-three rooms when counted, and says of Helen West Ridgely's "Old Brick Churches of Maryland": "I make objection that any of the churches of Maryland were built of imported brick. Where is the proof? In her book is authentic evidence that St. James's Church on Herring Creek was made of brick burnt upon the glebe. Surely the Marylanders had as good brick masons and as good brick clay as the Virginians."

A banker said to me only to-day: "They attribute imported bricks to Christ Church, Navy Yard, Rock Creek Church, and my church, St. John's, at Georgetown."

Till 1809 there was only a frame Christ Church; St. John's was built in 1804; the parish church system dates to 1692 and their history has been written. None claimed to be of imported brick. Georgetown was not laid out till 1752.

Hon. Wm. A. Jones, who has represented the Virginia tidewater region, thirteen counties and Fredericksburg City, many years, and who has travelled over them constantly, said to me:

“I do not know with certainty of any imported brick structure in the First district. The fact has been challenged there, as in Maryland. The church of character beyond any colonial church in Virginia is Christ Church in Lancaster County, built in 1732 by ‘King’ Carter, the greatest landholder. His constructions were built of native brick, I know, for his descendant has shown me the brick pits. A previous church on the spot dated to 1670. Carter was a model business planter, having his own mills, etc., and not the man to import what he could make. But there are stone sills, steps, etc., in some of our counties probably brought from other places. The people of the year of Washington’s birth certainly had good plasterers, and that is a lost art now. The plaster of old Christ Church, which stood windowless and doorless for years, is as perfect as when put on 171 years ago. That workmanship, the fact that the church was a gift from one man and that man knew how to build it, militate against the idea that we went abroad in colonial days for materials or craftsmen.”

Desirous to give the myth a last chance, I called last week on Mr. Bernard Green, the civil engineer and government constructor, who said:

“I have often heard with wonder the many stories of imported brick houses, when every reasonable probability is against them. A brick house of forty-five feet square, two stories and garret gables high, with one chimney (otherwise the ordinary four-roomed house and hall), would, if two bricks thick, or sixteen inches, take 150,000 bricks, and as bricks weigh two

and a half tons per thousand, a four-hundred-ton vessel would be required to transport them.

"Bricks," added Mr. Green, "come low down in the arts. Barbarian labor can make them. Fuel in a new country costs little. Lime or plaster would be a more reasonable thing to import, but shells and sand were the constituents of all our colonial coasts and rivers. To brag on such an inartistic thing as a brick, as if it were sacred, because the colonial forefathers did not make it, is the more curious in that our colonial houses sometimes had nice beading of plaster, or wood, and mouldings around the mantels and ceilings, probably Italian in style; these are not spoken of, but only the brick."

Bricks were made in Virginia in 1612: "The spademen fell to digging, the brickmen burnt their bricks." The first church at Jamestown was built of bricks burned there, like most of the houses, from "the best brick clay ever seen."

Says Mr. W. Hand Brown: "On the Eastern shore wherever we find an old brick house, or the site of one, we are pretty sure to find one or more circular pits near at hand from which the clay was taken and often traces of the ancient kiln. A gentleman who has made the early history of the Eastern shore his special study called our attention to these pits."

In 1621 the Virginia Company was entreated from Virginia to send over carpenters, brickmakers and bricklayers, more particularly to build a hotel at Jamestown.

The next year, 1622, the company writes to Virginia: "As for the brickmakers, we desire that they may be held to their contract \* \* \* that for the erecting of the fabrick of the college the materials be not wanting."

Here is a contract of 1736 in Virginia, where George Dudley, aristocratic name, "doth agree for satisfaction of four years' servitude to make for Isham Randolph 100,000 bricks and to set and burn them."

William Byrd, the second, who built Westover, since twice rebuilt, and who wrote more particulars than any Virginia colonial authority, who owned 180,000 acres, and was both a Londoner and an American, living from 1674 to 1744, says nothing about imported bricks, nor does his precise biographer, Bassett, but Mr. Byrd writes: "Send me a carpenter, bricklayer or mason!" and says of Edenton, the colonial capital of North Carolina (1728): "A citizen here is counted extravagant if he has ambition enough to aspire to a brick chimney."

His father in 1690 sent to Rotterdam, Holland, for a dozen Russia leather chairs, bedsteads, tables, curtains, looking glasses and "inke glasses." Yet numerous later authors, on no authority, tell of the imported brick of Westover.

The last ten thousand bricks were sent from London to Massachusetts, says Bishop, in 1629, for the construction of fireplaces. They were made at Plymouth for eleven shillings a thousand, when the first brick structure, a little watch house, was put there.

In 1620 there were 110 Staffordshire men in Virginia, among them tilemakers, brickmakers, bricklayers, potters and masons. The Mason and Tyler families possibly began among these.

Where a few brick only were wanted, as for a bay window or a wine vault or a grave vault, it was inconvenient to burn a whole kiln and the coaster was instructed to stow away a few hundred or thousand. Nine hundred negroes were stowed in vessels of 200 tons burthen. One negro of 150 pounds had the weight of only thirty bricks.



The one hundred and fifty maids sent out from England to be bought as wives by the Virginia planters weighed probably eighteen thousand pounds, or the weight of 3,600 bricks, one or two chimneys! Who would prefer to be the ancestor of a chimney and warm before it with a frozen back when he might be all surrounded by a maid whose freight was the same as twenty-four bricks?

Why did we not import tiles to cover houses, as well as bricks to make their walls? This was attempted at Jamestown, but the report was made from Virginia in 1612:

"The Colony had store of bricks made, yet they have no tyle; in that trade, our brickmakers have not the art to make it; it shrinketh."

Why, then, did they not import the tile they could not make, instead of bricks they made in profusion?

Virginia was settled 1607 with three vessels of 100 tons, 40 tons and 20 tons. The ship next year, 1608, was loaded for England with walnut boards, cedar posts, sassafras and iron ore, and the next year two vessels were built, one of 80 tons. One hundred cows were brought out in 1611, ballast enough.

The exaggerations about the larger Virginia houses began early, where these were so exceptional among the many huts.

When run down and challenged, the haunted houses of imported brick become very few, hardly half a dozen, and all in Virginia. Bishop Meade mentions hardly that many, although he examines, after his loose fashion of soliciting parish correspondence, about every county in Virginia, and as he says of Parson Weems's books: "You know not how much of fiction there is in them; you know not what to believe."

Stratford, the Lees' place, is but a basement and one story, and the Bishop says of it: "An American writer states there were once a hundred rooms in this house. How untrue this is! There are not more than seventeen and never were more. Another says there were one hundred stalls for horses in the stable—almost equally untrue."

The Bishop says of Roswell in Gloucester County: "Every brick was English and not paid for, and the roof covered with heavy lead over the shingles, entailing a heavy debt upon the estate." But Roswell had only twenty-three rooms and it was not built till 1725, nearly at Washington's birth, long after there was less probability of bricks being imported to America than of coals to New Castle. If Mann Page possessed 70,000 acres of land, a twenty-three-roomed house was nothing too large, yet it is declared to have been "the largest and costliest mansion in the colony."

More than thirty years before Roswell, the Capital at Williamsburg, was built, and bills for moulding and burning its bricks are still extant, the two places only a few miles apart and connected by water. "This immense pile (of Roswell)," says the bishop, repeating himself, "every brick of which, and doubtless much other material, together with the workmen, were imported from England and not paid for, except by his agents and friends there, until the sale of those (30,000 acres) of lands in Virginia enabled his son, long after, to do it."

"The corner stone of it was laid by *old* President Nelson, when an infant, as it was designed for him. He was held by his nurse and the brick laid in his apron and passed through his little hands. The bricks were all from England."

Yet the house of alleged imported brick was taken down in twenty-eight years and the Revolutionary house of 1748 erected on its site, and it is this second house, though he means the first, which Bishop Meade claims the original imported bricks for.

We now come to the first great city in all the colonies, Philadelphia, before the creation of which no house of brick can here be extant.

Philadelphia was the metropolis of both Maryland and Virginia before they possessed any important town and it revived everything south of New York as far as Charleston.

Penn wrote in 1684 that Philadelphia had 357 houses, "divers of them large, well built, with three stories," and he enumerates among his tradesmen "bricklayers, masons, plasterers, plumers, glasiers." A history of Sussex County, England, says that Penn picked out of that county 300 of its best mechanics "in order to settle a great town." Penn's own house, now in Fairmount Park, dating to 1683, was not built of imported brick, and if brick ballast was needed to settle vessels of burden, surely a city so furiously shot up as Philadelphia must have ballasted a whole fleet of such. In 1685 there had been put up "600 houses in three years' time, 250 built in twelve months," and that year Robert Turner wrote to Penn that "thy brick house had the effect of encouraging others to build of brick instead of wood, so that now, bricks being cheap and improved in quality, many brave brick houses are going up with good cellars."

"The two brickmakers are building a double brick house." "Thomas Smith and Daniel Page are partners and set to making of brick this year, and they are very good." "Pastorius and his Dutch people are preparing to make brick next year." They were build-

ing in 1685 a Quaker meeting house of brick sixty feet by forty.

Of the many large brick houses around Philadelphia like Stanton, built 1728, the Fairman mansion, which lasted from 1702 to 1825, Hamilton's Bush Hill, built 1714, down to the State House, built 1741 and the noble specimen of Christ Church, built as it stands, 1727, no hint was made that they were of imported brick.

Williamsburg, Va., was not begun until Philadelphia had become a large, stout city, but neither it nor its precursor, the brick church of 1678, imported any brick. The governor, Nicholson, who established Williamsburg, also made Annapolis a State capital, where are more fine brick houses than in all colonial Maryland elsewhere.

Had these, the first successful towns south of Philadelphia, required to import brick they would have been imported from Philadelphia, hardly two days' sail to the north, and in 1695 "good brick clay having been found in the neighborhood of Annapolis, contracts were made with Casper Herman, a burgess from Cecil County, for the erection of the parish church, school house and state house." The Herman family were from the brick town of Newcastle.

Georgetown, Alexandria, Baltimore, Fredericksburg were the Renaissance cities of the tidewater, and drew their population from the West, and mainly from the Germans. Slavery was a greater interest than towns, and until a non-slaveholding, mechanical people emerged from the West, the towns were little wharves, like Dumfries, Yorktown, Tappahannock, or even Annapolis and Norfolk. Till a Californian built across the continent to old Williamsburg nobody could see the hollow dearth it was, though described in rainbow colors. Baltimore became the late heir to twenty abortive towns formerly statutized about the Chesapeake.

We can affirm, without a doubt, that no church nor public building in Maryland or Virginia was made of imported bricks; that no private residence or lesser structure was wholly or mainly built of such bricks; that the composition of any part of any existing colonial house as of imported bricks from England is misty and unproved; and that, in every probability, no structure in America was ever walled with English bricks till our own time, and no colonial house of such material is standing in the United States.

Ten thousand English bricks are all that are recorded as sent to Massachusetts and for the construction of the large wood fireplaces, firebricks, perhaps, in 1629. As late as 1789 President Washington was surprised to see all the dwelling houses of New England with stone and brick chimneys, whereas, the primitive Virginians still used "catted" chimneys of sticks and mud, which had caused Jamestown, Boston and New Amsterdam to burn down.

In Bishop's "History of American Manufactures" we find that bricks were made at Salem among the witches in 1629; that in 1790 nearly 800,000 were exported, mainly to the West Indies, and that there was a brick machine in 1800.

New York is left out of the tattle of "imported English brick," because its imported brick, if there were any, came from Holland, a much more likely story.

Governor Stuyvesant made bricks in New York and there, it is alleged, that some yellow bricks were imported from Holland, but Albany made yellow bricks in 1630. Before 1700 New York had brick pavements.

It is declared that New Amsterdam and Albany imported Holland brick, and the price is quoted in 1661, of \$4.16 per thousand, payable in beaver skins, but before this, or in 1657, there was a tile kiln sold at

Albany, called a *Pannenbacherig*, and if native tiles were then employed, what occasion for imported bricks, especially when stone was everywhere and the Dutch brickmakers universal? Vessels between New York and Holland sailed by the Dutch West Indies, getting cargoes of sugar, rum, slaves and whatever would pay. That potent nation was not carrying bricks for posterity.

I suspect that preparations were made to import and inspect Dutch bricks at New York, but that the immediate rise of the brick manufacture precluded the experiment. Valentine notes that Tunis Kray was tally-master of the bricks and tiles imported from Holland in 1655, not the first instance of a *sinecure* office, for in 1637 bricks at New Amsterdam sold for ten florins a thousand, or four dollars, the price of four bushels of rye. Mr. Burr Todd claims that the inn of 1642 was "of Holland brick," but in 1628 they baked plenty of native bricks there.

The duty upon imported bricks was made forty shillings on the hundred pounds' worth, and O'Callaghan says that the resources of the country in building material were not at first understood, so that Van Rensselaer, living in Holland, sent out, in 1642, 30,000 building stone, 4,000 tiles, and 3,000 bricks, but his commissary told him to stop, as the tiles were not worth the freight and the stone was better at Albany. That year, the outbreak of the English civil war, New Netherlands was nineteen years settled, and we may presume that it was the last of Dutch imported bricks. Twenty-five years after that, the entire New Netherlands had only 20,000 people. Not only yellow bricks, the color of those called imported, but Delft blue tiles were made in New York.

Although Timothy Dwight, a New England preacher, asserted, in 1798, of Albany, like Bishop Meade of Virginia, that the first house in this town is now standing and was built of bricks brought from Holland, yet the Albany publisher, Joel Munsell, who collated fourteen volumes of Albany records, says: "It is doubtful if any of the Dutch houses had brick brought from Holland."

All the checkered tiles necessary to trim a small toy-like house of New Amsterdam might have been packed in a barrel or might have been burnt in the large fire-places described by Sarah Knight.

Parts of dwellings on the bay waters were brought from other states, and other countries, as to this day. Marble mantels, keystones, gravestones, nails, gate caps, iron work useful and ornamental, veneers for panels, were used for the tasteful, often beautiful mansions, of which the best do still exist but are few, such as Mt. Airy, Va., built in 1750, and Sabine Hall in 1730.

Nobody knew Virginia better than Jefferson, who was descended from the barn builder, Randolph, the common ancestor of the Virginia Randolphs, as the Masons and Tylers were probably just what their name is, wall masons and roof tilers, for in the Norman French *maçon* meant a bricklayer. The Masons came from Stafford, a county of pottery and bricks, and named their Stafford County in Virginia, for it.

"The private buildings of Virginia," wrote Jefferson, in 1785, "are very rarely constructed of stone or brick, much the greater portion being of scantling and boards plastered with lime. It is impossible to devise things more ugly, uncomfortable and happily more perishable. \* \* \* The college and hospital (at Williamsburg) are rude, misshapen piles, which, but that they have no roofs, would be taken for brick kilns. \* \* \*

A workman can scarcely be found capable of drawing an (architectural) order. The genius of architecture seems to have shed its maledictions over this land. \* \* \* Buildings are often erected by individuals of considerable expense. \* \* \* But the first principles of the art are unknown and there exists scarcely a model among us sufficiently chaste to give an idea of them."

Houses in England, Shakspeare's included, were made of timbers filled in with lath, plaster and pebbles, or of wood and mud thatched with straw, and without glass or chimneys. The great fire of 1666 caused London to rebuild with more bricks, after the English conquest of New York.

In the concordances of Shakspeare I find only one mention by that author of bricks, when Smith the weaver says of Jack Cade: "Sir, he made a chimney in my father's house and the bricks are alive at this day to testify it."

"Philadelphia," said Dean Prideaux, "were it all built according to the design, would not be much behind any other city in the whole world."

Brick palaces in London were hardly known until William of Orange. The low Hampton Court was the first. Whitehall, burnt in 1697, was a composite structure. If Raleigh spread his cloak before the Queen, that showed no brick pavements. Until the navigation act was repealed, England got many bricks and all her tiles from Holland, close by, where was no stone, but bricks.

Holland was the example-setting country of our colonial times. Hume says that to make as great a country as Holland led the English nation into the civil wars, as Hollands' United States named ours. He says that London in the time of James I. "was almost entirely built of wood and in every respect was cer-



tainly a very ugly city. The Earl of Arundel first introduced the general practice of brick buildings.”

And from our start, bricks were higher in England than here and not as good. The brick of London does not compare with that of our coast cities, built upon the nearly pure clay deposit that is below the heads of tide, whilst chalk and marl adjoin the British metropolis.

If it was reasonable to transport in sailing vessels on the stormy Atlantic a cargo that will not at the present day pay to transport a few miles by rail, bricks would have been a more natural export *to* Europe than *from* it. They belonged to the class of raw materials.

It is a poor encomium upon such a house as Westover that its tasteful proprietor and his society could not make its bricks.

When the courts of the Library of Congress were lined to make them light, with white-enamelled bricks from England, the spirit of our brickyards leaped forth like Daniel’s image from the furnace, and soon supplied that new necessity, as we may believe that our emigrant forefathers would not sit down in the clay till somebody made them a wall, like Bottom in the Dream:

“O wicked wall! through whom I see no bliss,—  
Cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me!

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus have I, Wall, my part discharged so  
And being done, thus Wall away doth go!”